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The Face of China As Seen by Photographers
and Travelers from 1860 through 1912 is probably the
largest and the most significant and comprehensive
collection of early photographs of China ever assembled.
The exhibit brings together for the first time,
photographic views of China, its land, its people,
and its culture, all photographed from the
mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century.

Photographs in the exhibit were found
buried in museum archives, in gallery and museum
collections across the country and around the world,
and in boxes in the homes of private collectors in
the United States and abroad.

Michael Hoffman, Advisor for the Alfred
Stieglitz Center of the Philadelphia Museum of Art,
organized the exhibit in Philadelphia. Mr. Hoffman
visited some 50 different locations and reviewed over
10,000 photographs to select the more than 200 pictures
on display.

Mr. Hoffman has indicated that the show is primarily focused upon displaying the best photographs made in China during the 52-year period between 1860 and 1912. Selection of the photographs in the exhibit was made on the basis of the quality of the images and the spirit of China evoked by those images rather than upon any effort to photographically document the period.

Subjects included in the exhibit range from landscapes and views of cities to temples and interiors of Chinese homes. There are views of pagodas, palaces and monasteries, a Western-style restaurant, and rice paddies. Pictures of people range from Chinese nobility and government officials to Manchu brides and wedding couples. Views of courtesans, families, women with bound feet, as well as scenes of itinerant tradesmen and criminals awaiting execution all came under the cameras' lenses during this period. Margaret Loke, in ^a ~~the~~ New York Times Magazine, ^{recounts,} reported that the photographs in the exhibit range "from the breathtaking to the gruesome."

Very little is known about the hundreds of photographers who were taking pictures in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Western photographers who traveled to China during this period tended to follow merchants, missionaries,

adventurers, and assorted government and military personnel. A very strong sense of adventure accompanied Western voyagers who were setting out for China since so little was known at the time about the land and people of China. Travelers had little idea of the quality, the reality, or the origination of the civilization they were about to visit.

Much more, however, is known about photographic process and technique during this period and it is amazing that the attempt was ever made to produce photographs at all except under the most ideal conditions.

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The cameras of the period had to be very large
to accomodate glass plates ^{10 x 12 in. or larger} ~~10 x 12 inches or 12 x 16~~ .

~~inches or more in size,~~ which were used as negatives.
The weight of these glass

plates, which were transported securely packed in
wooden crates, was a formidable obstacle. Several
heavy interchangeable lenses used with the cameras and
the cumbersome tripod that was needed to hold the
camera added even more problems for the traveling photo-
grapher.

A portable dark'room also had to accompany
these early photographers and included a lightproof tent
plus all the chemicals needed for developing and fixing
the photographs and for preparing the glass plates
which served as negatives. In addition, large airtight
glass jars had to be carried for processing the glass
plates and the prints.

Upon occasion the early photographer found it
necessary to hire a large number of local porters to
transport all of this clumsy equipment which was requir-
ed to set up laboratories in the field.

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It is clear that nineteenth century photographers had to be persons of considerable stamina, as well as persons well trained in chemistry and its practical applications. Photographers produced their own photographic emulsions and developed and printed their own photographs with relatively primitive materials. Each successful picture was the result of a strenuous endurance test for the photographer.

Virtually all the photographs in the exhibit were taken by Western photographers and many reflect a Western point of view in the scenes and people that they depict. It is perhaps interesting to consider what the results might have been had the Chinese turned the cameras on themselves.

The first known Western photographer in China was a man named Felice A. Beato, who traveled with the Anglo-French armies to depict the conquest of Tientsin () and the sacking of the Imperial Summer Palace outside ~~the capital~~, Peking. Beato's works are included in the exhibit, as well as the photographic works of John Thompson, who focused on the imperial family and its subjects. Also on view are photographs of Donald Mennie and the White brothers who aimed their cameras at the landscapes that were so often the theme of Chinese landscape artists. Pictures taken by E.H. Wilson, Thomas Childe and others are included in the exhibit as well as works by photographers whose identities are unknown.

Photographs in the exhibit were brought together from private and public collections including photographs from the archives of Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; British Museum, London; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts; Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.; Library of Congress; Museum of New Mexico; National Archives; National Army Museum; Naval Historical Center; New York Public Library; Peabody Museum of Salem; Smithsonian Institute; Victoria and Albert Museum; and the collections of Chaoying Fang; Arnold H. Crane; Edmonton Gallery; Elaine Ellman; Graphics International; Hillelson/Kahn; Howard Ricketts; Daniel Wolf; and a number of others.

An illustrated catalog for the exhibition
has been published by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in
association with Aperture, Inc. and will be available
at the Museum Sales Desk.